

DIRECTOR (USIA) HENRY E. CATTO, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

Initial interview date: March 23, 1988

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Q: Today is March 23, 1988. This is an interview with Ambassador Henry E. Catto, Jr. concerning his work in the Department of State. My name is Charles Stuart Kennedy; this interview is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies.

Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give me a little background on what led to your interest and involvement in foreign relations.

CATTO: Oh, study in college. Area of interest all my life.

Q: What were you studying in college?

CATTO: Oh, I studied politics and history mostly.

Q: Where was this?

CATTO: At Williams College.

Q: When did you leave Williams?

CATTO: 1952.

Q: '52? Then we must have overlapped. I graduated in 1950.

CATTO: From Williams?

Q: Williams, yes.

CATTO: No kidding. I didn't know that. Imagine that.

Q: Yes. [Break in tape]

We just discovered we both have been in Williams College, overlapped. I was in the Class of 1950, Ambassador Catto was Class of '52.

What type of courses were you taking there? Was it sort of international relations?

CATTO: Yes, had Fred Schuman's great course.

Q: He was a renowned professor of international relations and wrote the standard textbook on this.

CATTO: Which I discovered the other day and thumbed. It's fun to reread.

Q: What did you do after you left Williams?

CATTO: I moved back to Texas, went into the family business and heavily into Republican politics. And over the years, when the Republicans finally won an election, I had bet on the right horse and came to Washington.

Q: This election was Nixon's election in-

CATTO: '68.

Q: 1968. So you came, what, 1969 to Washington?

CATTO: That's right.

Q: And what did you do at that point?

CATTO: I was appointed by the President to be deputy representative to the Organization of American States.

Q: Had you had any connection-I mean obviously you came from Texas, but had you had any other connection with Latin America?

CATTO: Other than travel, no, not really. I had the Spanish language, and a certain amount of travel experience in Latin America, and that was it. I was not in business involved in Latin America, but interested. We, for example, had been very involved in the San Antonio World's Fair in 1968 which was called Hemisfair, which was aimed at the Latin American connection. I had been on the board of that and very much involved.

Q: Your family business in Texas was where? In San Antonio?

CATTO: In San Antonio.

Q: And what was it concerned with?

CATTO: Insurance and real estate and that kind of thing.

Q: Did you seek the position with the OAS?

CATTO: Not specifically. All I knew was that I wanted to get involved with Latin America one way or another.

Q: Why?

CATTO: Interest. Fascinated, like the people, like the politics, like the area.

Q: What did your work involve with the OAS?

CATTO: Mostly working with the OAS Council on Education, Science and Culture, one of three OAS councils. The main one, the political one, this one and there was a third dealing with economic affairs.

Q: And what were some of the issues that you had to deal with?

CATTO: Oh, transfer of technology. Problems of how-everything that had to do with what can the United States do for the Latin American countries without becoming too overtly Yankee imperialistic. How can you help us and hide the fact that you are so it doesn't hurt our politicians. Part of the charm of the OAS from the Latin American standpoint was that it tended to launder American assistance and give it the imprimatur of an international organization; rather than the Yankee dollars flowing directly, passing through an international organization gave the aid a legitimacy that some Latin politicians thought direct aid didn't have.

Q: What was the Nixon Administration attitude towards Latin America?

CATTO: They didn't know where it was. Who was it? Maybe it was-

Q: Kissinger said it was a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica.

CATTO: Of Antarctica, exactly.

Q: And I think this permeated. Had Nixon traveled much? I mean, he'd had one-ill-fated, not ill-fated.

CATTO: Caracas.

Q: He'd had the Caracas trip. But had he made other trips there?

CATTO: Not that I recall. And certainly during the course of my involvement in Latin America there was nothing. I remember when I was Ambassador in El Salvador, the Salvadoran president sort of hinted to me once that, gee, it would be nice for me to get an invitation to Washington to go see President Nixon. The idea was risible, who would have dreamed of this ever happening. I also remember when President Johnson of course had gone down and met with five presidents of Central America. I remember one sort of amusing tale about that. I had gone to see Johnson before I left for the OAS post and he was regaling me with Latin American stories. One of which was that this dinner was in San Salvador and he was to meet and eat with the five Central American presidents. He was panic stricken because he didn't speak any Spanish and he thought, this is going to be one heavy duty to spend the whole evening with these guys. And he said to his military assistant, "look, if I put my hands behind my head and rear back, that's going to be a signal and you're going to come up to me and say, 'Mr. President, there's a telephone call of great urgency,' and I'm going to get out of this." Well, as it turned out, these five funny little men that he was having dinner with turned out to be pretty interesting and the language barrier was not really a barrier and he got involved. And an animated man always, at one point he clasped his hands behind his head and the aide came charging up and said, "Mr. President, you're wanted on the telephone." And he said, "Well, who the hell is it?" The hapless aide, "Er, sir, I mean, you-." He said, "Well Goddammit, get his number and I'll call him back."

So that was atypical of American attitudes toward Latin America at the time.

Q: I might just for the record, when we're talking about the Caracas incident with Nixon, he went down there as vice president and there were major demonstrations in which the car was attacked, rocks, spat upon, and all that. In a way it was sort of, I tried it once and I never want to try it again.

How did you find your role at the OAS? How did it connect with the American Republics Bureau (ARA) in the Department of State?

CATTO: Oh, we were very much under the thumb of the ARA. Our delegation office was in the State Department, right down the hall. John Jova was my boss during that time, a distinguished career officer from whom I learned a great deal. The marching orders came pretty well from ARA, as you would expect.

Q: Again, did you suffer from-or not suffer, at least bask in benign neglect, would you say?

CATTO: Yes, pretty much. The Secretary of State would come to the annual meeting of the OAS, make a speech and flee in terror as quickly as he could get out of there. The issues were not on the front burner during those calm days.

Q: It was really Vietnam absorbing.

CATTO: Totally absorbing. All of the energy and attention of Kissinger and of the Secretary of State, who at the time was Bill Rogers.

Q: After you were there with the OAS from 1969 to '71, I take it-

CATTO: Right.

Q: And then you were appointed Ambassador to El Salvador.

CATTO: Correct.

Q: How did that come about?

CATTO: I don't really know. I had let the White House know that I after a couple of years was ready to move along and would like a mission. And in some mysterious way, the methods of which I never found out, one day I got a call that said I was going to be named Ambassador to El Salvador. I'm delighted that it worked out that way.

Q: Had you sort of indicated that you would prefer a Latin American post?

CATTO: Oh, yes.

Q: Understood?

CATTO: Absolutely.

Q: How does this work? I mean, whom would you talk to to let it be known?

CATTO: I talked to Peter Flanagan in the White House. He was an Assistant to the President at the time.

Q: So he was the contact for this.

CATTO: Exactly.

Q: When you went to El Salvador, did you have any agenda in mind of things that you particularly wanted to do?

CATTO: No. Absolutely not. I had no preconceptions. I had been to the country on a trip that I took when I was in the OAS delegation. I took a tour around, well I guess I went to Salvador and Argentina and Brazil briefly, to get a taste of the Latin political scene when I first went to the OAS. And then I, of course, to my surprise, came back to Salvador as Ambassador two years later.

Q: Did you get any real instruction as far as what you were supposed to do from the State Department?

CATTO: No.

Q: Just go down there and-?

CATTO: And try not to bother us too much.

Q: How about how to be an ambassador.

CATTO: The only thing that was really useful was a compendium of experiences that previous ambassadors had put together, pretty much on their own, entitled This Worked for Me.

Q: As a matter of fact, behind that book is a little bit of the genesis of this project, because I think this is a major piece of statecraft as far as how to do this. I think it's a very useful book.

CATTO: Does it still exist?

Q: It still exists and people talk about it, but I don't think they've republished it.

CATTO: Really? In all those years.

Q: But it's a very good book.

CATTO: Oh it was a terrific book. Very, very helpful because having never served in an embassy abroad before I really didn't know what was expected.

Q: Even for professionals, it still is very useful as you move up. But then there was no course or major briefing before you went down?

CATTO: Oh, sure. Yes. You went and called on the Secretary of Commerce and on the Director of the CIA and seems to me there were some briefings at FSI and this and that. But it was all fairly slapdash.

Q: You felt this was rather pro forma?

CATTO: Pro forma, it clearly was pro forma. Everybody went through it and it was certainly not in depth.

Q: When you arrived in El Salvador, could you describe how you found-what the situation in the country was at the time you came. We're talking about when in 1971?

CATTO: About when in 1971?

Q: Yes.

CATTO: October, I think.

Q: October of 1971. What was sort of the political, economic situation of El Salvador?

CATTO: Well, the economic situation had deteriorated because of the paralysis of the Central American common market. That had really worked, and worked well, and the five countries were-the trade was flowing among them and it was a huge success. Unhappily the brief was bitter war of 1969 between Honduras and El Salvador-

Q: This is the soccer war?

CATTO: The so-called soccer war, which if there were ever a misnomer that was it.

Q: How did this happen? Why was it called the soccer war?

CATTO: Well, it was called the soccer war because slowly building tensions over the years between the two countries exploded into violence which led to war between the two at a soccer game between Honduras and Salvador. What it really was was a demographic war, maybe the first for all I know, because so many Salvadorans, given as they are to being very hard workers and given the fact that Salvador was and is hopelessly overpopulated, they seeped over the border into Honduras in vast numbers, taking jobs that the Hondurans, perhaps more languid people, wanted or thought they ought to have themselves. And they resented the presence of this foreign enclave along their borders. And the soccer game was the trigger that led to a brief, bloody war.

Q: When you arrived, what was the situation between Honduras and El Salvador?

CATTO: There were no relations. The OAS had been working on bringing about a settlement of the boarder. There had been a long festering border dispute as to exactly where the frontier lay between the two. Relations were bad.

Q: What was the government like in El Salvador when you were there, when you first arrived? I know there was an important election later.

CATTO: When we first arrived, the government was-the president was a man named Arturo Armando Molina, who had been a career military officer and was one of a line of presidents that belonged to the established party that had run the country for many, many years. It was passed from one military officer to the other, always the officer because of constitutional reasons would resign and then be elected as a civilian. But it was always an officer. Take it back, Molina was the one that was elected. The president when I got there was Fidel Sanchez. And Molina in a fraudulent election was-

Q: '72, yes, that's when he came in.

CATTO: -was elected president.

Q: What was the role of, was it the oligarchy. I understand there were two major powers, one was the military and one was the, I don't know, the 14 or however many families there were, wealthy families.

CATTO: There were about 100 wealthy families. Time magazine I think it was decided there were 14 families and the idea stuck with the media. But the relation was changing because in the '30s and '20s and earlier the power of the wealthy was tremendous. But in the '40s and '50s and '60s, as the economy grew, the state became a whole lot more powerful than it ever had been and the balance of power clearly shifted. There was a time at which the wealth of an individual family might have been a major chunk of the GNP, but that was no longer the case when I got there. The government clearly was powerful. The oligarchy sat in their fincas in the country and-

Q: These are ranches?

CATTO: Exactly. Mostly coffee plantations. And enjoyed the good life, eyeing nervously the military, who by then as I suggested, they were running the country and the government of the country had a whole lot more power than any individual family and a whole lot more than all of them put together. But the military mostly let them alone so there was an uneasy truce between them. In my judgment anyway, the idea that the military-correction, that the oligarchy ran the country was not correct. It was run by the military.

Q: Where did the military officers come from?

CATTO: They came from lower middle class homes. The military was the escalator for a bright and ambitious lower middle class type person to rise to the top of Salvadoran society. Conceivably he might marry into one of the aristocratic families, but much more likely he would ride up the military escalator and begin to enjoy the benefits of privilege.

Q: What was the role of the companies who would buy the coffee, I don't know, it was United Brands, or United Fruit.

CATTO: Not a factor. Salvador was not like Honduras or Costa Rica or Nicaragua in that coffee was the main crop. It was not a monopoly situation at all. They were always struggling to sell their coffee in the world markets against Brazil and Colombia and Mexico and some of the other coffee producers.

Q: So there was no major firm, especially an American firm, that-

CATTO: American investments as a whole when I got there it seems to me were less than \$100 million. It was a very minor-American companies were minor players on the Salvadoran scene.

Q: Well, how did you find the embassy staff? I'm not talking about did you have enough people, but I mean, as far as their competence and-

CATTO: Very good, for the most part. Obviously some were more able than others. But generally the country team I thought was good. I made good friends among them, felt that I was supported even though I was an outsider, a non-career officer. From the very beginning I got guidance and support that was entirely loyal, as far as I could tell.

And of course one interesting thing was that it was a joy to work in that embassy because it was so beautifully done architecturally, the grounds, everything was pleasing to the eye. I'm sorry to say that the earthquake of, what, almost two years ago now, just destroyed it.

Q: And then of course the war there has not helped at all.

CATTO: No, the war has not helped. At one point a rocket was fired into the meeting room at the embassy.

Q: This was during the-

CATTO: During the height of the troubles that came along in the '70s and '80s.

Q: But you found, for example, your DCM was a good team player and-.

CATTO: Terrific guy named Terry Leonhardy. Went on to become Consul General in Guadalajara and was kidnapped, a case that was famous at the time.

Q: Yes, I remember that. Well, what were you trying- what did we want out of El Salvador?

CATTO: Mostly votes in the U.N., cooperation on the world scene. It was for me a wonderful cautionary tale on the inability of the United States to affect what goes on. You hear people say, well, we ought to be able to get support from our European allies, they ought to go along with us. Hell, I would go call on the Foreign Minister and say, would you please vote for us on U.N. Resolution 242 or whatever it might have been. And they'd say, well, maybe, but maybe not. And often as not they would come down on the not side because they just couldn't have cared less, on most political issues, what Uncle Sam thought. Now when it got down to assistance, both military and developmental, yes indeed they would listen to us. But the assistance and the, quote, friendly relations, had very little to do with the way the Salvadorans would vote in international fora. They went their own way.

And of course we never pushed them vigorously like we are, for example, pushing the Panamanians today. We never really had to lean on them for anything, nothing of grave importance came along. But they were pretty independent.

Q: What did the Salvadorans want from us?

CATTO: Money.

Q: In what form?

CATTO: Technology transfer. Educational assistance. During the course of my time there they were conducting an interesting nationwide experiment in educational television in which because there were many migrant coffee workers, they installed a nationwide curriculum so that the children of the coffee workers, if they began to do the coffee picking in the eastern part of the country and worked their way west, no matter where a child was for a month or two months or whatever, the curriculum would be the same and all of it was tied to television. It was a source of great pride to them that they had this national set-up which leaned heavily on television to teach the basics of education.

Q: This seems to be, must have been inspired more by the military? Because I would imagine that the wealthy families would prefer to keep the peasants relatively ignorant and docile.

CATTO: It was sponsored by the government. And by the bureaucracy. I think you can overplay the role of the military in things like the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Economy and other things. The military had its own problems worrying about the Hondurans and so forth. So I would say it was more a matter of the bureaucracy, not the military. And I don't really recall, but to the best of my recollection the oligarchy was proud, like everybody else, of the strides that they had made in education. I don't think there was any conscious attempt to keep the peasants ignorant on their part.

Q: What sort of aid were we giving to the military at that time?

CATTO: Not a lot, mostly training. Training in weapons use. The Congress about that time cut off some of the police training, which I thought was extraordinarily unwise just because in some Latin American countries police had been involved in human rights violations. This was upsetting.

Q: Probably more reflecting Argentina and-

CATTO: And Uruguay in particular. But, as I say, I think that was an error on the part of Congress because certainly in El Salvador the American police officials that we had there helping with police training were people of very high quality who only wanted to teach them that you don't have to beat people up in order to get cooperation and to enforce the laws.

Q: So this is sort of an example of having an overall law passed by Congress which really didn't pertain to many other places.

CATTO: Exactly. Out of ignorance and good intentions really doing harm when they were trying to do good. The law of unintended effect was one of the first laws I learned about.

Q: Did you get much visitation from Congress in those days? Today there's practically a shuttle plane going back and forth to Central America.

CATTO: The highest American official that came was the Governor of Mississippi to a trade fair. And he was Governor Waller. He and his wife came down and we had a dinner party for him. We went out to the airport to meet him and he got off the plane, handed me his suitcase, and said, What's the name of this country? or words to that effect. As it turned out, they brought along their daughter. She was not expected but we certainly welcomed her and as we drove into town we went past the embassy building, the office building, of which I was very proud because it was wonderful architecture. And I said, "this is where I work." And the daughter said, "Is that the embassy, Daddy?" And the governor said, "No, honey, that's the capital city." Now that gives you some idea of the sophistication of the governor of Mississippi at the time.

Q: But you weren't getting congressmen coming down or anything like that?

CATTO: Oh, God, I never saw a single, solitary congressman. The day that Robert Pierpont of CBS News came through was a source of great rejoicing because we'd never had even a reporter. Actually somebody else, I guess it was somebody from "60 Minutes" came through on something or another. But the press and congress were unknown.

Q: Which I suppose in a way was a blessing, but at the same time you must have felt somewhat isolated there.

CATTO: We did. I would have welcomed more contact with the outside world.

Q: How about the relations with the State Department, the Central American desk and the ARA bureau?

CATTO: Choppy from time to time. I remember in particular on deputy assistant secretary of state being highly critical of the way the defense attaché½ behaved in the uprising of March 1972. He had gone to the place where the president was being held by rebels in order to see what was going on. And we were criticized because he had done that, lest it be thought to have been a tacit sign of support of the rebellion that was taking place, which of course it was not. And then also we had been asked, the United States government had been officially asked during the course of this brief bloody rebellion to bring the president-elect, Molina, back from a trip he was taking to Taiwan on an airplane. And we had done so and then had sent a bill to the Salvadoran government for a huge amount of money, it seems to me it was something like \$30,000, for the airplane ride. And I had protested that as being unwise. They charged everything, including amortization of the original cost of the contract for the building of the airplane, and all kinds of stuff. And here's this miserable poor little country that could barely get along under the best of circumstances, that we were trying to send money to, and instead here we were presenting them with a bill for a very large sum of money. That was one of my darker days when I had to go to the president and say, ur, eh, sir, here's what you owe the United States government. And he took one look at it and said, gee, can I pay it in installments? I complained vigorously to Washington about that, but we lost. They made it stick.

Q: The accountants will rule the world.

CATTO: The accountant mentality took over and overruled the diplomatic mentality in that case.

Q: Before we move to political events a little later, how did you find-again, in an unclassified way, was the CIA active and were they supportive or something?

CATTO: Sure. The CIA was active, run by a great, great guy named Red Gremillion from Austin, Texas, who has been somebody that I've kept up with from time to time over the years. Liked him very much. Responsible, decent guy.

Q: Did they keep you informed? I mean, were you being embarrassed or surprised by things that happened?

CATTO: Negative. Never, never.

Q: What about the military there?

CATTO: Absolutely outstanding. We had one little cause of trouble and worry in that the head of the military training group that was there, a group of seven or eight Air Force and Army officers, a colonel by the name of Bill Willis, who was a marvelous guy, hard worker, really get out in the field with the Salvadoran military. And one day he came into my office sort of pulling at his forelock and said, "there's something I think you better know." I said, "What's that, Bill?" He said, "well, yesterday, I was out driving in the rural part of the country, driving myself, and just as I was about to crest a hill a truck going the opposite direction came over that hill in my lane, he was passing at the top of a hill and forced me off the road." He said, "Sir, I sure did get mad at this driver." I said, "I don't blame you, Bill. What did you do?" He said, "Well, sir, I turned around and I followed that truck." "Oh?" He said, "Yes, sir, I followed that truck and I," he said, "I curbed him." "You did what?" "I pulled him over to the curb." "And then what happened." "Well, sir, I got out and I began to explain to him"-now Bill Willis' Spanish was not all that good but it could be vociferous when it needed to be-he said, "I explained to him how dumb it was to pass going over a hill and he almost killed me and I had to throw my car into the ditch." "What happened then?" He said, "Sir, I shot out his tires."

So I expected that we would have a request for this wild-tempered gringo to be thrown out of the country immediately, but we never heard a word about it. Apparently the lesson that he was intending to impart to this hapless, probably illiterate truck driver, was received and accepted.

Q: Turning to the political situation there, was there any guerrilla activity going on?

CATTO: Negative. There had been one murder before I arrived. The son of a wealthy family-a very progressive, liberal-minded young businessman, had been kidnaped, ransom demanded, ransom offered-a large amount, I can't remember the amount but it was a lot-but apparently the kidnappers panicked and shot him and killed him, left his body in a bag by the side of the road. That was the first hint that there was serious trouble to come.

Q: But you didn't see at that time that this was going to turn into a nasty movement? Or did you?

CATTO: I think it could-yes, it could have been foreseen as something that there would be more of. This just didn't look like an isolated incident, and indeed as time went past it became the way that the Communists used to gain money, was simply kidnaping and the payment of ransom to finance the purchase of arms. Alas it worked. And it cost us many friends and cost the country a lot of decent people. There were a lot of people murdered.

Q: During this time when you were there?

CATTO: This happened after I left.

Q: This happened after you left. Were you sort of letting the State Department know that there was a potential for problems there?

CATTO: No. I don't remember having said that this is going to turn into a major guerrilla warfare. During my two years in El Salvador there was no kidnapping. There had been the one and nothing followed. But shortly after I left it got quite hot as kidnapping became the tool of preference for the financing of the guerrilla war.

Q: What was your relationship with the other American ambassadors in other countries? Your predecessor had moved to-

CATTO: Guatemala.

Q: Guatemala. What was his name?

CATTO: Bill Bowdler.

Q: Bill Bowdler, yes.

CATTO: He was terrific. We would visit back and forth. I took my whole family up to Guatemala City and with all of the Bowdler family we went on pirogues, went down the Rio Negro, I think it was called, one of the nicest trips I've ever taken. It was terrific.

Q: So you felt you were a team? Were you swapping information?

CATTO: Absolutely. And John Jova had been in Honduras and he was my boss at the OAS. He was succeeded by another man I knew whose name is not coming up on my screen right this minute. Hew Ryan, Hewson Ryan. And I also visited Hew. I visited in Nicaragua my colleague there. So yes we kept in touch.

Q: What was the major change while you were there? I believe there was an election which in a way started some of the unhappiness within the country.

CATTO: Yes, there was. There was a presidential election in which Jose Napoleon Duarte, the current president of El Salvador, was running. He was at the time the mayor of the capital city of San Salvador and he, a Christian Democrat, was running against Molina, the anointed candidate of the official party, the Partido de Conciliación Nacional (PCN), and on election night by chance Bob Pierpont of CBS was in the country and was staying with us at the residence. And we watched the returns come in for a while-I say watched, listened to them on the radio, really-and all of a sudden there was an announcement that counting had been suspended. This was very, very suspicious and all observers concluded in the following days that indeed Duarte had gotten more votes than Molina but the PCN was not willing to give up power. So they rigged the votes and the official candidate was elected. And this rent the delicate fabric of democracy, which had been building-Duarte, indeed all the big cities were in the hands of the opposition. The opposition had representatives in the Parliament. The democracy was, if not perfect, building until this happened, a clear case of fraud. And this I think contributed in no small part to the disillusionment of people on the left who were then driven to throwing in with the Communist rebels, people like Ungo who had run with Duarte, a leftist politician although not a Communist, threw in with them making popular front common cause. Seeing what happened to Duarte destroyed faith in democracy, I think, among a lot of people.

Q: Did this come as a surprise, both the strength of Duarte and also the reaction of PCN?

CATTO: Yes, I think it was a surprise that he had won. But he had been a very popular mayor of San Salvador. And then he made a mistake, moving along in the political tale, a couple of months after the election a couple of air force officers launched a totally non-ideological rebellion and Duarte at the last minute threw in with them and urged the people to go into the streets and avenge the stolen election. The people did not choose to go to the streets, the rebellion collapsed. I mentioned earlier that although the president, Sanchez, had been kidnapped and put in jail, it eventually failed. Duarte was blamed because he did throw in with them. He took refuge in the Venezuelan embassy; Venezuela at that time was in the hands of Christian Democrats and they were members of the same party, so there was a certain sympathy between Duarte and the Venezuelans. The Salvadoran government went into, in total violation of international law, into the Venezuelan embassy, took Duarte out, beat him up. The diplomatic corp was very much afraid that he was going to be killed. The Brazilian ambassador and the papal nuncio and I went to call on the foreign minister and said, for God's sake, do not murder this man. It would be seen very badly in the world and it would be very bad on the country. The following day the president, Fidel Sanchez, who had been kidnaped and humiliated after a vigorous firefight in which his home was pockmarked as a teenager's skin, by gunshots-he had defended himself in a very lively fashion before he was captured. When we called on the foreign minister he said-problems of the ill-fated rebellion and the arrest of Duarte. President Sanchez had a press conference the next day and the reporter said, "Where is Engineer Duarte?" and Sanchez said, "I do not know." And I thought, uh-oh, he's had it. But it turned out that he had been put on a plane and was on his way to Guatemala and exile.

Q: When you went with the Brazilian ambassador and the papal nuncio, was this on instructions or did you do this?

CATTO: I did this. This was not on instructions. There had been in the afternoon following the arrest of Duarte, after the failed coup attempt, a meeting of the diplomatic corp and a committee had been appointed of the three that I mentioned and we went.

Q: Did you ever have the feeling-

CATTO: Communications had been difficult.

Q: Did you have the feeling that if you had to act quickly, the best thing was to do it rather than wait for the action to come from the Department?

CATTO: Exactly. I did this without the by-your-leave of the Department.

Q: Again, just moving on. Was there any residue of the Alliance for Progress when you were there, or had this pretty well died out?

CATTO: It had spent itself. The Nixon Administration was not anxious to give a whole lot of credit to the Kennedy-Johnson years, so the Alliance for Progress was not touted as such, although the aid programs kept on.

Q: Just to move on, you left in 1973. Was this at your volition?

CATTO: This was at my volition.

Q: And then you became Chief of Protocol.

CATTO: Yes.

Q: Why?

CATTO: It's a nasty job that somebody had to do.

Q: Had you asked for this?

CATTO: Yes. We had to come back for the sake of our children's educations. They were reaching an age where they needed to get into really good schools, so we had to come back. I heard that the Chief of Protocol job was going to be open and thought that it would be interesting to do.

Q: How did you find this job? You said it was a nasty job, but did you find that was it as interesting as being an ambassador?

CATTO: Oh, in a different way, yes, because you got to meet everybody in the world and travel with the President abroad and travel with distinguished guests in the United States and show them the country. Frequently I would spend a good bit more time with a foreign head of government or of state than the President himself would. And that was interesting.

Q: One of the questions-I spoke to a former Chief of Protocol, Marion Smoak, who said that he felt that the Chief of Protocol, at least in his time, was not used to real advantage because you did spend so much time with them.

CATTO: He's exactly right.

Q: And yet there was no sort of briefing saying, this is our policy and while you're there if you get a chance to do this-. I mean, you were treated almost, I won't say a social butterfly, but you just weren't treated as somebody in the policy pushing business.

CATTO: That changed. When Henry Kissinger became Secretary of State he had been very impressed by the efficiency of the Chinese protocol system in which everything was so highly organized and in which protocol was an arm-in-arm companion of the policy makers, and in which he was quite sure that everything that would be said in the presence of protocol officers was indeed reported. And when I became Chief of Protocol shortly after he became Secretary of State and his instructions were to go and do like the Chinese did. To make the bureaucracy of the State Department aware of these possibilities was not so easy as it had been to have the Secretary of State himself be aware of it, but I regularly reported on every conversation and everything like that.

I shall never forget one of my successors who had been well known as the wife of an ambassador to a country said-I told her when she came into the job, I said, you can make this a reporting job and she said, "you mean that if I were to talk, say, to the Queen of England, you'd want me to tell what went on between us?" I said, "Of course." She said, "I would never do that." So the social butterfly aspect still lives.

Q: Can you think of any particularly memorable trips either of somebody coming in or you going out?

CATTO: Fourteen days with the Emperor of Japan was indeed a memorable trip.

Q: How did that work? This was his first trip to the United States wasn't it?

CATTO: It was. And it was fascinating and difficult and demanding.

Q: The protocol must have been-

CATTO: Only the British are as difficult as the Japanese at planning absolutely every move of every day.

Q: Were you concerned with the Emperor of Japan about anti-Japanese feeling?

CATTO: Yes.

Q: Because he was the leader of Japan during World War II.

CATTO: Yes I was, but it did not happen. Everywhere he was very warmly received, throughout the United States. Big crowds. Even in the East when he went to Boston he was very warmly received. He went on to Woods Hole because he is a distinguished marine biologist and he was received well everywhere. And especially in the West where many people of Japanese descent, in California and Hawaii, were in the streets in vast numbers.

Q: How about-did you go on any Presidential trips?

CATTO: Yes. The last couple of months of Nixon's administration I went with him to the Soviet Union, to Israel, Syria and Egypt.

Q: If I recall, this was sort of a way to get away from the turmoil of the United States.

CATTO: Exactly.

Q: At least it was seen as that.

CATTO: Exactly. Yes.

Q: How did you find Nixon? As an international figure?

CATTO: Although I had been on the advance trip planning the great hegira and was with him during the course of it, I don't think he ever said a word to me. He was distracted and out of it.

Q: This is because of the-

CATTO: Because of the Watergate problem.

Q: Because of the Watergate problem. Well, I think you're under a time constraint, I guess.

CATTO: I am under a time constraint. We can certainly continue at another time and I'm sorry this has come up. I've got another 5, 6 minutes if you have other questions.

Q: Why don't we talk then just a little-call me when it's over. But you became the Permanent Representative to the United Nations in Europe from '76 to '77. This would be under Gerald Ford.

CATTO: Yes.

Q: How did this come about and what does it mean?

CATTO: It came about because I was about to go crazy from the Chief of Protocol's job, going to all of the functions to represent the government, doing all of the traveling, all the rest of it. I was ready to get out of that and wanted another post abroad. And I spoke to Brent Scowcroft at the National Security Council, he was head of the National Security Council at the time and we had worked closely together over the years. After a while he called me back and said, "You can have Geneva or Bogotá ½."

Q: These are as ambassadors?

CATTO: As ambassador. And I opted for Geneva, The European Offices of the United Nations.

Q: What were your functions in Geneva?

CATTO: It was an extraordinary smorgasbord of different and interesting things, all the way from the International Labor Organization to World Health Organization to world headquarters of the Red Cross, the world headquarters of something with the inelegant acronym of WIPO, the World Intellectual Property Organization, etc. So there were lots of things you could get involved in. Particularly I was interested in the World Health Organization because they were on the lip of wiping out smallpox at the time, and in the ILO because we were on the lip of withdrawing from it because it had become so dominated by anti-Israel interests that were thought to be inimical to United States policy.

Q: What would you do? What action?

CATTO: Go to meetings mostly. It was like being an alcoholic, all you did was go to meetings. Here was vastly different from El Salvador because the Congress people and the hotshots flowed through Geneva in carload lots.

Q: How did you find-were they interested in what you were doing or were they mainly interested in Geneva?

CATTO: Well, they were mostly interested in what they were doing and in Geneva. Although of course there were many, there was a world radio conference there and one of the commissioners of the FCC came over, Bob Lee, a marvelous guy. There were so many interesting people that you just couldn't believe.

Q: Looking back on this, what would you see was sort of the greatest accomplishment you had, and the reverse might be your major frustration.

CATTO: The greatest accomplishment of my diplomatic years, I think, was helping to keep Duarte alive. I felt good about that. I felt good about the way we reported the rebellion and the general political scene in El Salvador.

The greatest frustration, I guess, is the inability to, particularly in a small remote post like Salvador, to get things done that you thought ought to be done.

Q: What type of things, would you say?

CATTO: Oh, I mentioned earlier my frustrations about the presenting of the bill to the Salvadoran government. I was unable to turn that around, and I think that was a mistake. That was bad. And of course in Geneva I really wasn't there long enough before James Earl Carter discovered and permitted me to go on my way and return to the private sector, to get a strong feeling of what that might have turned into. But I think it would have been an interesting post.

Q: Looking back on this, what would you say were the strengths and weaknesses of the Foreign Service, professional Foreign Service?

CATTO: The strength clearly is corporate memory, an ability to remember that certain things are over the long haul unwise to do, or conversely, wise to do. The great weakness of the Foreign Service as I saw it was an unwillingness to take risks, to go outside of the normal chain of communications, to do anything unusual.

Q: Okay. Very good. I thank you very much.

End of interview